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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between the level of achievement motivation of Essex County College students and their grades in psychology. Forty-one ECC students, both male and female, predominantly lower-class black students, took part in the study. The level of achievement motivation was measured in terms of the scores a person obtained on a Personality Questionnaire, Scale 1 of a standardized test in achievement motivation. Grades were measured in terms of the final grade the student received in a psychology course. Results of the study showed that there was no correlation between the test scores on the Personality Questionnaire and grades in psychology courses. (DB)

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A STUDY OF THE LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION AND ITS RELATION TO STUDENT GRADES IN PSYCHOLOGY

By

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INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the level of achievement motivation of Essex County College students and their grades in psychology.

In a previous practicum this researcher (henceforth referred to as R) studied the effects of teaching achievement motivation to Essex County College (ECC) students. Even though his study was not significant, he did find that the students that were taught achievement motivation did perform better on their exams than the controls. Recently, in looking through the ERIC files, R found a study by Boggs in which Boggs compared remedial and nonremedial community college students. In this study he compared the students' grades in their community college with the students' level of achievement motivation. The test for achievement motivation was constructed by Costello (1968 p. 17-18). Similar to Costello's findings, Boggs found a relationship between students' grades and their level of achievement motivation. Boggs says, "on the average the motivation to be successful is lower for remedial students than for non-remedial students." (1968 p. 9 - 20).

This study be Boggs renewed R's interest in the study of achievement motivation. R decided to do a study where he would

use Costello's test to see if he could find a relationship between ECC students' level of achievement motivation and their grades in psychology.

Hypothesis

The higher the students' level of achievement motivation, the higher his grades in psychology.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The term "achievement motivation" is a term popularized and studied intensely by David McClelland. In his book, THE ACHIEVING SOCIETY (1961 p. 36-106), McClelland cites numerous studies that indicate that the achievement motive is associated with economically successful individuals. McClelland goes as far as to indicate that the societies of the past that were economically successful, as well as those of the present were those that possessed the greatest number of people who scored very highly in achievement motivation.

Brown (1965 p. 435) defines precisely what McClelland means by achievement motivation when he says that a high need achiever is one who has a strong "concern with competing successfully with some standard of excellence." Brown explains that a "standard of excellence" could be just about anything that could be considered a societal achievement (e.g. to assemble the most units on an assembly line,

to be a great engineer, to get high grades in school.)

Studies indicate that people who are high need achievers tend to, on the average, out perform low need achievers on a large variety of tasks. Lowell (1952 p. 31-40) found that persons higher in achievement motivation showed a higher level of performance on both verbal and arithmetic tests than persons lower in achievement motivation scores. Since that study many others have been done, some confirming that high need achieving students perform better than low need achieving students and others disconfirming it.

McClelland, at one point, talks about the high need achiever's lack of attaining excellence in all areas when he says, "Yet their need for achievement does not lead them to do particularly well in school." (1964 p. 51) Atkinson offers a possible explanation. He (1964 p. 265-268) explains how another dimension must be added to the understanding of the achievements of a person who is high in achievement motivation, that is the "fear of failure." Sometimes a person who is high in need achievement but also high in fear of failure or what he calls "test anxiety" may perform poorly on certain tasks because the strong anxiety about tests inhibits his achievement.

R would like to examine the phenomena of achievement and find out whether or not it is relevant to ECC students. R has spent much time in the past learning about achievement motivation and learning how to teach it to students. When he has taught it to his

students he has noticed some positive effects from the need achievement workshops. It may be possible, however, that achievement motivation is not relevant to the students at ECC and that he was wasting his time. If this is so, he would like to find out. It might be that achievement motivation is purely a middle class phenomena and that it simply does not apply to ECC students who are mainly from the lower class minority groups (mainly black and Puerto Rican.)

There is no doubt however that some of the students at ECC are suffering from motivational problems and R would like to better understand these motivational problems in order to better understan d methods he could use to help motivate failing students. R believes that by performing this study he could gain insight into some of the motivational problems of students. R believes that some of the aspects of teaching and studying achievement motivation can direct researchers towards roads that will help find ways to help motivate low achieving students like those at ECC.

Monroe (1972 p. 214) indicates that motivation is a problem with community college dropouts when he says, "About one-third of the dropouts report financial difficulties...But a word of caution is needed. Are inadequate finances a cause for withdrawal, or are they a convenient alibi for dropping out?...Some studies show that students who work in order to meet their college expenditures tend to

make better grades than those who do not. Many students who persist in college have the same financial problems as the dropouts, but better motivation causes them to find means by which to remain in college."

Essex County College has a staggeringly high attrition rate (about 20% of the incoming freshmen graduate) and R believes that one big reason why many of these students fail is lack of motivation. Medsker (1960 p. 48) cites a study in which 10,000 students in 20 two year colleges were asked to give their reasons for withdrawing; 28% said because they had "full-time employment," 16% claimed "personal and health" problems, 8% said "not interested in school or dissatisfied," 6% listed "financial" problems, and 10% listed "nonattendance." The total percentage for these five categories is a surprisingly high 68%. Again we must ask are the reasons these students gave for withdrawing the <u>real</u> reasons they left, or just convenient alibis? R believes that motivation plays an important part in these students leaving college.

What about aptitude? Maybe some students can't learn even if they are well motivated. Roueche agrees with B.S.Bloom when he quotes Bloom as saying, "Most students (perhaps over 90%) can master what we have to teach them ... aptitude is the amount of time required by the learner to attain mastery of a learning task." (Roueche 1972 p. 64-65) R agrees with Medsker and Bloom in this assumption.

Finally Roueche (1968 p. 12) states seven reasons that he believes often characterize a low achieving student. One of these characteristics is that they are "weakly motivated, lacking home encouragement to continue in school." Since most of the students at ECC are low achieving, R is attempting to examine as many avenues as possible in order to find ways to help the student to 'survive' in the community college. Achievement motivation is one avenue to explore.

PROCEDURE

Names and Operational Definitions of Variables

a. Level of achievement motivation

A standardized test is used to measure the student's level of achievement motivation. (See figure 1 for the test. Notice scale I and scale II.) The first ten questions, Scale I, are the ones that Costello and Boggs found to relate to student achievement. Costello and Boggs found no corelation between scale II and student's motivation. In this study the purpose of keeping scale II in the test is to compare the two scales. R is interested in finding out why scale II does not corelate with achievement motivation because the questions in scale II seem to be achievement motivation related. The comparison may lend a clue as to why scale I is corelated with student achievement. (This is a type C operational definition [Tuckman

1972 p. 60.])

b. Grades in psychology

The final grade of those students in one section of each Introduction to Psychology and Abnormal Psychology was used as the indicator of grades. (This is a type B operational definition [Tuckman 1972 p. 59.])

Description of Sample

This study used 41 male and female ECC students. Roughly half of the sample took Introduction to Psychology and the other half took Abnormal Psychology.

Measurement of Variables

a. Independent variable

The level of achievement motivation was measured in terms of the scores a person obtained on scale I of the standardized test in achievement motivation (see figure 1.)

b. Dependent variable

This variable was measured in terms of the final grade the student received in his course in psychology.

RESULTS

The raw data is presented in Appendix one. After running several preliminary corelations, R discovered that there was

absolutely no corelation between the scores on the test and the grades in psychology. The corelations were so close to zero that R decided it would be useless to even include them in this paper.

It is interesting that Boggs and Costello could find corelations between achievement motivation and grades and that R could not. Even though Boggs and Costello do not discuss the socioeconomic or racial backgrounds of their subjects, R suspects that possibly the students that they tested were predominantly middle class whites. The classes that R tested were predominantly lower class blacks and he believes that this makes a difference.

After several years of researching and experimenting with achievement motivation, R has come to believe that achievement motivation is a middle class white phenomena and that achievement motivation is less likely to work in a college such as ECC which is predominantly lower class and consists of mostly black students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R has concluded that achievement motivation does not seem to be related in any way to the grades that an ECC student receives. Therefore he will send these findings to the counselling department and discuss with them the program that they have in teaching achievement motivation to students. R believes that a modified approach to achievement motivation must be tried. More studies

must be done on motivation to find what type of motivation drives a lower class black student to receive higher grades in school. If this could be found then we would be on the road to helping the ECC student learn how to motivate himself in school and therefore be better able to handle the vigorous academic demands ECC makes on him.

Figure 1 - Personality Questionnaire

Name _____

(Underlined answers indicate achievement motivation responses)

Sex _____

Age _____

Scale I

Circle One

1. Are you inclined to read of the successes of others rather than do the work of making yourself a success?... yes <u>no</u>
2. Would you describe yourself as an ambitious person?..... <u>yes</u> no
3. Do you work for success rather than daydream about it?.. <u>yes</u> no
4. Would you describe yourself as being lazy?..... yes <u>no</u>
5. Do you usually work to do more than just get through an examination?..... no <u>yes</u>
6. Will days often go by without your having done a thing?. <u>no</u> yes
7. Do you do things "today" rather than putting them off to do "tommorow"?..... no <u>yes</u>
8. Are you inclined to take life as it comes without much planning?..... <u>no</u> yes
9. Do you work hard at a job?..... no <u>yes</u>
10. Do you, or did you, do little preparation for examinations?..... <u>no</u> yes

Scale II

11. Do you grow excited when telling someone about the work you are doing?..... <u>yes</u> no
12. Do you usually remain free from boredom when on holiday?..... yes <u>no</u>
13. Are you very interested in the lives of successful people?..... <u>yes</u> no
14. Do you remain relaxed at the thought of a difficult task you are about to undertake?..... yes <u>no</u>
15. Are you usually unimpressed by how hard others work?.... yes <u>no</u>
16. Are you usually able to sleep even when engaged in an exciting job?..... yes <u>no</u>

Figure 1: cont.

17. Are you usually awed in the presence of very successful people?..... yes no

18. Can you usually concentrate on what people are saying to you even when an important job is unfinished?..... no yes

19. Does the great achievement of others sometimes make you feel small?..... no yes

20. Have you at any time tried to model your life on that of a successful person?.....no yes

21. Do you readily forget your work when you are on holiday?..... no yes

22. Are you influenced by those around you in the amount of work you do?..... no yes

23. Do you usually remain free from envy when others are successful?..... no yes

24. Do you often compare how well you can do something with how well others can do it?..... no yes

Appendix I

Student	Sex	Age	Score Scale I (highest possible score = 10)	Score Scale II (highest possible score = 14)	Grade
1. GW	M	19	9	11	A
2. R	M	28	5	7	C
3. MM	F	30	9	9	I (incomplete)
4. MG	F	34	6	7	B
5. AS	M	25	1	9	I
6. JL	F	20	5	11	C
7. BH	F	19	9	5	C
8. SJ	F	22	7	11	C
9. JR	M	24	7	7	B
10. DJ	F	19	10	7	B
11. PL	F	18	10	9	C
12. L	F	20	5	7	I
13. DR	F	20	8	7	C
14. MV	M	20	6	8	B
15. RR	F	--	7	8	C
16. DR	F	18	5	8	C
17. SL	F	19	9	9	C
18. PJ	F	19	8	8	C
19. CF	M	26	5	5	B
20. DH	F	39	7	4	B
21. JW	F	32	7	9	D
22. NK	F	20	5	7	A
23. AM	F	38	9	12	A
24. LG	M	20	4	10	B
25. TH	M	39	8	6	C
26. PD	M	32	6	4	C
27. CL	F	28	9	8	I
28. CC	F	20	8	8	B
29. BA	M	32	7	7	I
30. LS	F	19	3	5	B
31. EG	F	31	10	11	A

Appendix I
continued

Student	Sex	Age	Score Scale I	Score Scale II	Grade
32. PB	F	31	10	10	A
33. LJ	F	28	7	7	B
34. WY	M	21	6	2	I
35. FD	M	28	6	7	D
36. DG	F	--	7	10	B
37. SI	F	27	10	11	B
38. MR	F	20	9	6	C
39. JW	F	29	6	9	C
40. BW	M	29	9	8	C
41. AG	F	44	8	12	B

MEDIAN AGE = 24

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